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RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HERMOSILLO 000079

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/MEX, EMBASSY MEXICO FOR MCCA DONAHUE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ALOW](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: PRISON CONDITIONS IN SONORA: JUST AS BAD AS ALWAYS, ONLY
MORE PUBLICLY SO

REF: A) HERMOSILLO 0024, B) HERMOSILLO 0064

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: After the prison break of January 15 in Hermosillo (Ref A), Governor Eduardo Bours Castelo fired top management and ordered a review of the entire state prison system. The investigation uncovered serious irregularities in 15 of the 16 prisons in Sonora. As a recent visit by Consulate staff also showed, the response to the prison break, while exposing existing problems, has also created some new variations on old ones. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Although Sonora calls its prisons CERESOs ("Centros de Readapcion Social," or Centers for Social Readaption), the state has never had the resources to care adequately for even the basic needs of many prisoners, let alone their social re-adaptation. Riots, escapes, overcrowding, crime, and lack of adequate sanitation and nutrition have long been issues of concern. According to local media reports, 15 of the 16 state prisons have "serious irregularities." Current capacity is for 6,500 prisoners, yet 14,000 people are behind bars. In some prisons, as many as 16 people share cells designed for three. Thirteen of the facilities do not have adequate sanitation. In addition, treatment for tuberculosis is inadequate or, in some cases, such as the prison in Ciudad Obregon, entirely lacking. Treatment for AIDS is largely non-existent, as well. Most prisons do not have separate facilities for the mentally ill. The kitchens serve the prisoners their meals (often no more than beans) in recycled cans or jars and do not provide eating utensils.

¶3. (SBU) Consular officials met with the former State Director, Eusebio Pillado Hernandez, on January 16, 2006 (Ref A). He described the prisons of Sonora as a "disgrace." Some of his plans before he was fired had included the separation of federal prisoners from state ones, the separation of violent and non-violent offenders, the issuance of uniforms, the installation of security cameras, and the blocking of cell phone signals from inside the prison. He was able to institute a system of fingerprinting and photographing visitors, although it was not in use during ConOff and ConAsst's last visit in late January. Pillado Hernandez said the biggest problem regarding the prisons overall is lack of health care.

¶4. (SBU) When consulate staff visited CERESO 1 in Hermosillo on January 28th, they found an overwhelmed, frightened administration. Several people approached and whispered, "We have problems." Indeed, with 150 guards (on three shifts of 50 each) to guard more than 4,000 prisoners, how could they not? The interim director, Zenaida Zapien Nunez, murmured that she hoped to leave the job as soon as possible. (Prisoners

statewide have an informal pact to murder any prison director if they get the opportunity, according to Pillado Hernandez.)

¶5. (U) Press attention has been sustained and highly critical. The story has just recently fallen off the front pages of the papers, perhaps only because its replacement involves a high-speed shootout between rival drug gangs, whose gunmen included former state policemen, and a series of related incidents.

¶6. (U) Post currently has 12 prisoners in the facility. The ACS section received calls from two USCit prisoners shortly after the escape. Although state policemen have replaced the entire guard staff in an effort to enhance security and prevent corruption, three new state police guards allegedly assaulted and robbed a USCit prisoner of 600 pesos (Ref B). In an attempt to cover up their misdeeds, according to the prisoner, they then variously claimed they'd found heroin, a pill, and a twelve-inch homemade knife that belonged to him. He had been placed in a "punishment cell" with approximately 15 other men. The cell lacked bathroom facilities; they used plastic bags in the corner to contain their waste. After the intervention of ConOff and ConAsst, the police commandant agreed to return him to his old cell and expunge the charges. The prisoner had already paid 1,000 pesos to the old guard force for the right to share the cell with five others. He decided not to file a formal complaint because he feared revenge. COMMENT: ConOff and ConAsst not only found the USCit's story credible but, except for the new wrinkle of the allegedly improved guard force, unremarkable. END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) Part of the prison problem, according to a source close to the police, is that an informal, powerful brotherhood controls the prison system, effectively closing it to outsiders. Directors hopscotch from prison to prison, recycling the same ideas that they had failed to implement in their last jobs. While the governor had reached outside the system with the appointment of Pillado Hernandez, he has returned to it with his replacement, Raul Chavez Acosta, a former investigator with the

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state attorney general's office.

¶8. (U) Lack of funding compounds the problem. Both federal and state prisoners are held in the same system, yet currently the federal government only pays about 25% of the daily cost for each federal prisoner, although it had pledged to pay about 40%. Sonora has about 6,000 federal prisoners in its charge, of which nearly 2,000 are in CERESO 1 in Hermosillo. As noted above, Sonora's prisons also have about 7,500 more people than they are designed for.

¶9. (SBU) ACS personnel will continue to monitor the well being of USCit prisoners closely. COMMENT: As long as such prison essentials such as adequate health care, uniforms, and security cameras remain the untenable dreams of prison officials, consulate personnel will be pessimistic that reform will come soon to the prisons of Sonora. END COMMENT.
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